

BEING INTERVIEWED BY THE MEDIA

Three Key Principles

- **Define Your Audience**

Target the information toward targeted consumers and influencers.

Talk to the audience, not the reporter.

- **Lead With Your Headline**

Decide what your main point is before the interview.

Get the main point out as early as possible.

- **Stick to Your Agenda**

Bridge back to the key messages (no more than three to four key messages).

Be conversational, but be to the point.

Interviewing Techniques and Tips

During an interview, it is to your advantage to get your message across as many times as possible, using different kinds of support. The questions you are asked will not always lead you directly to your prepared messages, however. Try using these simple control techniques:

Bridging – Bridging is a technique used to move from what the reporter wants to discuss to what you want to discuss, from one aspect of an issue to another. It involves dealing with the reporter's question briefly and honestly and then promptly following that response with your message.

Some simple examples of bridging tools are:

“Yes...” (the answer), “and in addition to that...” (the bridge)

“No...” (the answer), “let me explain...” (the bridge)

“I don't know... but what I do know is...” (the bridge)

“That's the way it used to be... here's what we do now...” (the bridge)

“Yes, the black berets are new... but they represent unity because...” (the bridge)

Hooking – Hooking is a technique used to influence the next question you will be asked. Hooking calls for you to end your message with a statement that requires a follow-up question by the reporter.

For example:

“The Army dragster is an amazing machine, but it's really only a piece of the what the Army has brought to this racing team and to the sport.”

“You can control the interview”

“The Golden Knights have jumped with many famous people who have an Army affiliation.”

“Throughout its history, the Army has gone through many transformations.”

Each of the hooking statements listed above demands a follow-up question, such as:

“Oh, tell me more about these resources,” or “To what other services are you referring?”

Flagging – Flagging helps your audience remember your message by emphasizing or prioritizing what you consider to be most important.

For example:

“The most important point to remember is ...”

“I’ve talked about a lot of things today. It boils down to these three points ...”

Understanding Your Interviewer

There are four common types of interviewers:

- **Expert-to-Expert**

Knowledgeable and well informed

Respects your expertise (and your role)

Well-conceived questions

**Usually an easy and pleasant interview.*

- **Know-It-All**

More impressed with his/her “knowledge” than yours

Seeks to upstage or challenge you

Questions can sidetrack the interview

**Use interview management techniques to get back to message points.*

- **Tell-Me-Something-New**

A bit like the Know-It-All, but not as harsh

Will not upstage or challenge you with knowledge

Dismisses information in search of new material

**Frame comments in context of newness.*

- **Help-Me**

Neither knowledgeable nor prepared

Likely to depend on you to carry the interview

Lack of knowledge or preparation can make staying on track a challenge

**Conversely, you can control the interview with good technique.*

“Don’t ever assume the camera is off”

TV and Radio Interviews

The Preinterview — Usually, the host or producer will “preinterview” you for a few minutes before you go on the air. The preinterview is important because it establishes what is expected of you on the air and the direction the interviewer plans to take. Moreover, it’s your chance to tell the interviewer what you’d like to discuss.

Interview Duration — For radio and television, you will know beforehand approximately how long your interview will last. However, sometimes there are last-minute changes because of over-booking or a missing guest, and your time might be shorter or longer than anticipated. At the end of the interview, remain seated until the interviewer or producer tells you you’re off the air. Don’t ever assume that the camera is off.

Interview Start Time — Before the interview, ask the interviewer to tell you when the interview will begin. Sometimes it’s not clear when the preinterview conversation ends and the actual interview begins — and off-the-cuff remarks may reach listeners if you’re not aware that the interview has started.

Prepare Your First Answer — Prepare your first answer, and then you’re ready no matter what the interviewer asks. It’s surprising how often the prepared answer fits the first question.

The Prerecorded Interview — A prerecorded interview requires a different approach than a live interview because the reporter can edit the interview before it airs. When conducting a prerecorded interview, keep the following in mind:

You can — and should — ask if you can stop and restate your answer if you are unhappy with what you have said.

Always sum up your answers. The reporter is looking for a short statement, possibly as short as eight seconds. Think in terms of “sound bites.”

At the end of an interview, the reporter is likely to turn the camera to him/herself and repeat a few questions or shoot reaction shots.

Ask the reporter or producer when the interview is scheduled to air.

Be Yourself — No matter what type of interview you’re conducting, smile, relax and lean slightly forward in your chair. Speak in your normal conversational tone. Concentrate on speaking clearly and concisely.

“Nothing is off the record”

Keep Answers Short – Everything on radio and television is done to time. Keep answers short and concise or the interviewer will interrupt you before you are able to make your point. Most answers should be no longer than three or four short sentences. Watch the reporter for cues to finish up your answers.

Physical Demeanor – Act as if you’re on camera every moment. Sit still, leaning slightly forward in a natural and relaxed manner. Be particularly sensitive to unconscious movements such as touching your face, fixing your hair, straightening your glasses, nodding while listening (looks like you agree with what’s being said), etc.

Don’t Look at the Camera – Direct your attention to the person conducting the interview, not the camera. The cameraperson will follow you to get the shots he/she needs.

Physical Appearance – It’s important to dress in appropriate attire for interviews. Primary and solid colors work well on camera; stay away from prints. Men should be sure to shave closely.

Newspaper and Magazine Interviews – Restate your key messages often during the interview.

Make sure your delivery is anecdotal and conversational. Use stories or analogies to emphasize your statements.

Think through your answers. Feel free to rephrase or clarify your initial statement. Don’t hesitate to correct inaccurate statements made by the reporter.

NOTHING IS OFF THE RECORD (*ever*), even if you’ve said it is and the reporter agrees. Say only what you would want quoted. Keep confidential information confidential.

Don’t hesitate to double-check facts and quotes with the reporter.

The reporter may not fully understand the topic. Offer to provide background information that will be beneficial to the reporter and his/her readers.

The reporter will not call you to read his/her story to you. However, be sure to tell the reporter to call you without hesitation should he/she need any clarification or further information.

Remember to support your assertions with evidence.

*“Think for a moment before
you answer a question”*

Media Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Make positive statements.
- Always prepare for an interview.
- Work in key messages right away.
- Control the interview through bridging, hooking and flagging.
- Be yourself.
- Be conversational and use simple sentences.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to check on it and get back to them with the correct information.
- Sip water and sit up straight while you're being interviewed on radio.

Don't

- Say “no comment.”
- Use Army jargon or acronyms; instead, explain them in terms a civilian would understand.
- Say “off the record” comments or anything you don't want to heard or read.
- Use negative language.
- Argue.
- Evade.
- Repeat the negative.
- Guess or lie...if you don't know, don't answer.

Question Types – There are various question types that you may find troublesome. It is important to recognize them and handle them properly.

Irrelevancies – If an interviewer goes off-track, answer the question nicely and as succinctly as you can, and then bridge back to your subject.

Multiple Questions – Interviewers will occasionally ask several questions at once. Listen closely to the topic or topics most important to you and answer that one first.

A or B/Multiple Choice – If an interviewer gives you an either/or choice and the proper answer is not contained in those choices, simply say so and give the correct answer.

Absent Third Party – You should never answer for a third party like a company, association or other branch of the military that is on the other side of a controversial issue. Your answer should start with, “I can't answer for them, but I can tell you...” and bridge back to one of your key messages.

Hypothetical – If asked to speculate and it is to your advantage, make sure your audience knows that you are speculating. If it is to your disadvantage, it is important to say you do not want to guess or speculate.

Ranking – If you are being asked to rank something in order of importance when the reality is they are all equally important, you must answer them from your perspective with something like, “We have many priorities and they are all important. One of them is ...”

Inconsistency – It’s okay to do something different today than you did yesterday. Just remember to explain why the situation has changed.

Cheap Shots – Do not feel like you can’t interrupt an interviewer who is being nasty because it is their show. If you recognize you are being attacked, say something as simple as, “That’s not true.”

Ways to Answer – The way to answer a question can vary depending on the tone of the question asked. It is important to think for a moment before you answer a question or recognize the questions you do not have to answer at all.

Direct and Immediate Answers – Most questions will be on subject and expected. If you are prepared, it is the ultimate opportunity to get your point across. Often your first and best opportunity to explain why you are there is immediately after you are introduced.

Do not ramble. There is no magic length of an answer, but 15 to 25 seconds is a good rule of thumb. Try to be simple and direct.

Buying Time – Sometimes you know the answer, but in the heat of the moment it escapes you. You can buy time to think by: 1) asking the interviewer to repeat the question; 2) repeating the question yourself and rephrasing it if it is derogatory; 3) sharing your thought process with the audience and telling them you need to think about it; 4) pause for a few moments if the interview is not live.

Questions You Do Not Have to Answer

Personal questions

Competitive questions

Third-party questions (i.e., about other branches of the military, etc.)

Questions involving legalities, negotiations or security

You should share with the audience why you are not answering. For example, you could say, “I can’t answer that because I do not know,” or “I can’t answer that because it is highly competitive.”

If you elect not to answer a question, never say “no comment.” Using “no comment” is the equivalent of pleading the Fifth Amendment. It makes you appear as if you have something to hide.